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AUTHOR Nolan, Mary Ann Cascio
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ABSTRACT

First-year principals will assume the role of instructional leaders in environments created by their predecessors. How these novices feel, react, and attempt to fulfill the expectations of their supervisor, staff, and community are investigated in this paper. Three male and three female first-year principals in Long Island, New York public schools were selected for an in-depth examination of their day-to-day lives. A questionnaire and interviews were used to collect demographic information: sex, race, age, school size, socioeconomic level of the school, educational background, and prior administrative work experience. Information regarding motivation for becoming a principal, expectations of the role of a principal, and daily experiences as a principal was also collected. Preliminary findings of the first month of the school year for the three female principals are reviewed. Topics covered include reactive encounters, time management, politics, leadership and power, self-image and aloneness, and relationship to other subjects. The collection of data is ongoing and further investigations in this area will be conducted. Included are references and an appendix containing the preliminary information questionnaire form. (WTH)

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THE FIRST YEAR: WOMEN IN THE PRINCIPALSHIP

Mary Ann Cascio Nolan
Hofstra University and
Lincoln Avenue School
Sayville, New York

EA 019 506

A paper presented at the Annual Conference of the American Research Association in Washington, D.C. April, 1987.

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Introduction

Several Long Island school districts have elected to implement the early retirement incentives recently approved by New York State. Many principals hired after World War II to accommodate the surge of growth on Long Island during that period are now eligible to retire. A survey of Long Island school districts conducted by Gellman (1985) predicted that by the school year 1988-89, 149 building administrators on Long Island will reach the age of 55; of these, 80 are expected to retire and 51 new appointments are anticipated. Gellman noted that these are conservative figures since only about half of the districts contacted replied and that those responding districts indicated that it was difficult to project appointments beyond one year. Gellman further stated that although her study may not be necessarily generalizable, it does provide information on professional staffing needs of Long Island, and that it would be a reasonable speculation that similar patterns will emerge in other areas that are demographically comparable.

As building administrators retire, many of their positions will be filled with inexperienced principals. These newcomers will encounter environments that have been created by their predecessors. First year principals will assume the role of instructional leader in worlds they have not shaped. How will these novices feel, react, and fulfill the expectations of their supervisors, staff, and community?

A review of the literature on first year principals reveals that many veteran principals, after reflecting on their own first year, have felt a need to offer their advice to novices. This advice has been based, for the most part, on the recollection of events that transpired rather than on the charting of actual happenings. The articles were introspective, and reflected on the first year of one individual, usually the author. In effect, the information given was a self-report and depended on the accuracy of the author's memory. In contrast, little is known about the events that occur during a principal's first year and their ramifications as these events are unfolding. Rarely have first year principals been given the opportunity to report on their daily lives as principals while they are living it. Given this opportunity, how will a group of first year principals describe their daily work lives and what can be learned from their discussions?

In an attempt to understand the issues, I have been examining the day-to-day work lives of first year elementary school principals and recording their experiences on the job to ascertain the types of issues and problems which confront them. Today, I will report on one part of this study.

Method

Sample

The sample consists of elementary school principals experiencing their first year as a principal. I have selected elementary school principals since, for the most part, there is little or no support personnel at this level. Secondary schools usually have at least one assistant principal, several guidance counselors, and department chairs. Observations, evaluations, family problems, discipline, curriculum, and guidance are handled by different members of the administrative and/or teaching staff. Since elementary schools rarely have any of these positions, the principal is responsible for all the aspects of education in his or her school.

I collected advertisements of vacancies in elementary school principalships on Long Island from the New York Times "Careers in Education" section, professional journals and newsletters, and the Hofstra University Placement Services Newsletter. Using these advertisements, I contacted the school districts to determine who was hired for the positions and whether s/he was a first year principal. I asked ask the cooperation of the school districts in contacting these first year principals to ascertain their willingness to participate in the study. During the initial contact with these principals, the study was outlined for them and their role in the study was explained in detail. Although it would have been preferable to have all the first year principals participate, I acknowledges that only those who demonstrate a willingness to share

their experiences would be likely to see this study to its conclusion. Every attempt was made by me to include a variety of participants according to sex, race, age, school size, and socio-economic level of the school. Six principals, three male and three female, were selected for an in-depth examination of the day-to-day lives of these first year principals. Table 3 outlines the demographic information collected on the female subjects.

Data Collection

Data collection procedures and the projected timetable have been outlined in Table 1 and Table 2 of this text. Table 1 summarizes the types of information sought, the techniques to be used, and the sources of the data. In Table 2, I have outlined the anticipated periods of time needed to gather the information. As indicated, I began collecting names of potential participants in the summer of 1986, contact with these candidates was made in August and interviews and log collection will continue throughout the school year 1986-87. Analysis of the data will take place during July and August of 1987 with the final report to be completed by the fall of 1987.

Paper-Pencil Survey. A brief questionnaire was developed to collect the demographic information about the participants: sex, race, age, school size, socio-economic level of the school, educational background, and prior administrative experience.

Audio Logs: The participants were asked to keep logs of the experiences using a tape recorder. The participants were supplied with the tape recorder and sent new tapes every two weeks on which to record. The principals were asked to record daily events and their

reactions to these events. A prepaid envelope addressed to the researcher is being provided to allow the participant to return these tapes. I have made phone contact, when needed, with the principals at the beginning of each week to remind the principals to record for a few minutes each day and to allow the participants the opportunity to ask any questions that they might have.

Interviews. At the end of each month, I conduct interviews with the principals either by telephone or face-to-face. At least three of these interviews will take place at the participant's school.

Data Reporting & Analysis

The results will be reported in a narrative case study using fictitious names to provide the participants and the school districts with confidentiality. Theme analysis will be used to provide an in-depth perspective of the experiences of first year principals and how these experiences affected the principals. From the data collected, the researcher will make a list of cultural domains and of possible unidentified domains: search for similarities, contrasts, and universal themes; and write a summary overview of the cultural scene studied (Spradley, 1979).

Table 1

Data Collection Procedures Summary

Information Sought	Data Collection Technique	Sources of Data
Demographic Information: sex, race, age school size, socio-economic level of the school educational background, prior administrative experience	Survey Interview	Principal
Motivation for becoming a principal	Interview	Principal
Expectations of the role of a principal at the beginning, the middle, and the end of the first year	Interview Survey	Principal
Daily experiences	Log Interview	Principal

Table 2

Timetable for Data Collection

	J	J	A	S 1	S 2	S 3	S 4	O 1	O 2	O 3	O 4	N 1	N 2	N 3	N 4	D 1	D 2	D 3	D 4	J 1	J 2	J 3	J 4	F 1	F 2	F 3	F 4	M 1	M 2	M 3	M 4	A 1	A 2	A 3	A 4	M 1	M 2	M 3	M 4	J 1	J 2	J 3	J 4
Identify Sample	✓	✓	✓																																								
Survey			✓	✓																																							
Interview				✓			✓				✓				✓				✓				✓				✓				✓				✓				✓				✓
Log Collection					✓		✓		✓		✓		✓		✓		✓		✓		✓		✓		✓		✓		✓		✓		✓		✓		✓		✓		✓		✓

	SCHOOL/DISTRICT INFORMATION											PERSONAL INFORMATION						TEACHING EXPERIENCE					
Subject	School Enroll.	Socio-Econo Level	# of Asst. Prin.	# of Teach.	# of Aides	# of Sec.	# of Custod.	# of Elem. Schs.	# of Jr. HS	# of Sr. HS	Total Enroll. of Dist.	Sex	Age	Ethnic Back.	Highest Degree	Area of Spec.	Prior Adm. Exp.	# of Yrs.	# of Yrs. Elem.	# of Yrs. Middle	# of Yrs. JHS	# of Yrs. HS	Total # of Yrs.	Total # of Yrs. in Ed.
MARGE	310	Lower Mid. Class	0	22	4	1	3-1/2	3	1	1	2400	F	49	W	Masters + 60	Sci.	Sci. Coord.	3	0	0	0	7	7	10
TRICIA	410	Mid.	0	27	12	1	3	6	2	2	6500	F	43	W	Masters + 30	Read.	No	-	18	0	0	0	18	18
JILL	800	Mid.	Prin. Aide	48	3	2	2 day 3 ngt	12	2	2	17500	F	36	W	Masters + 60	Couns.	Prin. Aide (While teach)	10	15	0	0	0	15	15

Table 3

Findings

Since the data collection is still continuing at this point and will continue for several months, I have decided to review the preliminary findings of the first month of the school year of the three first year female principals for this presentation.

The data displays several broad themes namely, reactive encounters, time management, politics, leadership and power, and self-image and aloneness. Some of these themes have several components and some are overlapping. These are the experiences as reported by the principals.

Reactive Encounters

For the most part, the reactive encounters theme consists of interactions with parents, subordinates, superordinates, and colleagues. Although as teachers, these principals experienced this contact, it was on a more limited scale. Some of the principals expressed feelings of inadequacy because of the lack of awareness that they had of the real issues a principal addresses daily. Others spoke of the adjustments staff and parents need to make when a new person is appointed.

Jill told of the "lack of emotional preparation in dealing with parents." She related a story that occurred during the first week of school which surprised and exhausted her. A mother of a second

grader called her "crying and carrying-on" because her child did not want to come to school. Jill could hear the child "sobbing in the background" but according to Jill the mother was the one who "had lost all control of herself." Jill convinced the mother to bring the child to the school. When she arrived, Jill escorted the child to his classroom. Jill reported that the boy was fine and went into the room "with no problem" but when she returned to her office, she found the mother still crying. It seems that this boy was the mother's last child and that the mother continued to have difficulty adjusting to his attending school.

Tricia spoke of the "testing of the new principal" by the parents. Many just walked into the teachers" room or into her office, unannounced and expected to be accommodated apparently accustomed to this type of procedure. She has tried to encourage appointments. Jill told of a letter that she received that stated she was running "a prison" and that "she was the warden." She also reported on some safety measures she instituted, for example, children not being allowed in the building before or after school when no supervision was provided. She received a letter from a parent objecting to her procedures and which said "How dare I!" Jill continued by telling how she contacted the parent and addressed each point with her. Jill further told the parent that she was annoyed that the parent had not come to her first before she had written the letter. Jill stated that the parent was "taken aback" but that "the parents here were used to running the school and I wasn't going to let that happen!" Marge spoke of a parent who called her and wanted Marge to contact another parent and tell him that his son would be "put in jail" for

taking the eraser of the first parent's child. In an incredulous voice, Marge spoke of her "frustration in dealing with this overprotective parent in a kind and mature fashion."

In their relationships with teachers, the principals reported anxiety on the part of the staff especially regarding the new principal's philosophy of observations and evaluations. The principals used a variety of techniques to address this. Marge outlined procedures in a packet she distributed at the first faculty meeting. She updates changes and keeps the staff informed through a weekly memo. She used the investigation for the proper placement of a foreign-speaking student "as an excuse to get into several classes relieving some of the pressure of a new principal coming in." Marge held meetings with the teachers to set up objectives because it "helps me have a hook for observations and evaluations." She further spoke to a teacher who "yelled a lot" "under the guise that I didn't have strict guidelines for maintaining discipline and that it was OK to smile and be pleasant." Tricia made a concerted effort to meet with teachers, especially the special area teachers and told them "how much I wanted their input."

All three principals spent much time talking about their relationships with Central Office personnel ranging from the people in the transportation department to the Superintendent. All expressed a great deal of frustration in this area concerning their apparent lack of cooperation and their indifference.

Trying to sort out the roles of different departments of central office has not been easy for Tricia. She has found it difficult getting to know who is in charge of what. She reported that she is

"so annoyed about getting the runaround. People tell you what they think they know. I have to push to get a response." She told of calling different Central Office personnel, finding them not in their offices, and having to wait days for them to return her calls. Frustrated, she finally has resorted to "keeping a log and sending memos so I have it documented since the phone doesn't seem to work." At one point, she called another building principal and when he returned her call ten minutes later, she said, "I thought I had found Nirvana!"

Marge has been concerned with the "fuzziness from Central Office" and that they "don't make decisions that stick or in a timely fashion." She reported on a science program she and a team had helped develop with the Superintendent. (Marge had been the Science Coordinator for another district prior to this appointment.) This program was to be outlined for the Board of Education by the Superintendent. "Much to my surprise, the Superintendent didn't make the presentation as he indicated he would and we wound up making it!" she exclaimed. She then realized that the proposal would not be accepted as it was. She stated, "I should have been more aware that the superintendent would not stick his neck out until he saw the lay of the land." She continued, "I should realize how they have to work...they can only be effective if they get along with the school board...they must be careful...I should realize that more than one voice helps." She ended with "my feeling is not one of over confidence about our program being accepted." She also told of an administrative meeting where the head of the transportation department rescinded directions he had previously given to the administrators about the amount of time school buses were available

for field trips. She explained to him that she had already encouraged her staff to take these trips and now she would have to go back and say "sorry only one field trip." She stated, "I objected at the administrative meeting, or voiced my disappointment, maybe more than I should have."

Jill also reported several incidents in connection with Central Office — ones that angered and frustrated her. It appeared that a wooded area on the school grounds was to be cleared over the summer so that it could be used as fields for physical education classes as well as after school community activities. According to Jill, the work was actually begun during the second week of school "with every form of equipment descending on the schoolkeeping my children and my physical education classes from using the fields already available. It would have been easier if it had been done over the summer when it was supposed to be. Keeping the students away and arranging the classes was mind-boggling." She further reported that several buses were overloaded and she was receiving complaints. She examined the bus-rider printout provided by the transportation office and determined that 10 to 12 children who were actually riding the bus were not entitled to do so. She wrote letters to the parents of these children informing them that transportation would no longer be received. "Dismissal is at three o'clock and by 3:25 every line on my phone was lit up," she reported. The parents told her that a couple of years ago a deal had been worked out with transportation allowing their children to ride the bus. She took their numbers and promised to investigate. When she called the transportation department, she was informed, "Oh yes, such a deal was made." She

inquired as to why they did not update their records and further told them in regard to the overloading problem, "You fix it, I tried!"

The frustration level of the principals rose with each negative event. The tones of their voices expressed tenseness and disillusionment. These reactive encounters which they are experiencing daily are new issues for them; ones for which they have had little formal preparation.

Time Management

The principals continued to express concern about the incidents that thwarted their objectives to work with educational matters and the classrooms. All spoke of the inordinate amount of time spent on managerial, organizational, and people-related jobs. Tricia stated, "What concerns me is that I must get into the classrooms and out of my office. People come to se me with genuine concerns, but I must get out! I have lots of drop-in visitors, for example, the Music Chairman stopped in today. We had a lovely talk about the philosophy of the arts, but I didn't really schedule that hour into my day." Marge is "troubled by the time I have to spend on management tasks." She reports on one day toward the end of September that she "didn't observe. I did paper work. It was the first time I allowed myself the luxury of doing paper work during the day. I feel guilty about it." Jill has decided "to buy myself roller skates. I cram every minute with something." She complains that "today we spent 4 1/2 hours at an administrative meeting that could have taken a half hour. I was happy to return to my school"

It then seems that these principals' days, at least at the onset of their careers, are filled with matters that are tangentally connected to the education of the youngsters entrusted to their care.

Politics

The political world of education was touched on by these principals, often with surprise in their voices. This surprise seems to indicate that they were not as attuned to the political culture that exists within many school systems as they should have been. Tricia, who came from a small district, recounts many instances, "in this large district" where one department referred he to another and then back to the first because that "is not in our realm." She talked about one of her first administrative meetings and stated, "I had no idea about the political game going during a meeting of the principals." Earlier, I told Marge's story on the politics of the Superintendent and the Board of Education. She talked further about the incident and stated that "I recognize that the Superintendent must be guided by his beliefs and he knows the clientele better than I do." She elaborated on her attempts to succeed in this political world, "I went jogging with the PTA mothers after school. I get exercise and build bridges with the PTA at the same time." Jill told us that she came from another school within the district so "I know what has been happening. I am the fifth principal in 17 years in this school."

These musings on the new administrative world they have entered display their growing comprehension of the role of each individual in his/her school system.

Leadership and Power

The themes of leadership and power also appeared in the accounts of these first year principals especially when dealing with their inherited staffs and parents. I have already examined Jill's establishment of rules and procedures for the children and some parents' negative reactions. She also spoke about suggestions she made to teachers on the handling of problem children. Marge addressed the fact that the teachers "had to get used her science background instead of her being the new kid on the block." She further pondered making changes in the use of instructional time, but "I don't want to make too many waves at this point." Tricia talked about having to "establish my leadership on the Child Development Team...I know I have a problem with one resource room teacher who really ran the show last year...it's lingering." For the most part, these principals were not overly verbal on this topic. However, as these principals try to establish themselves as the educational leader of their schools, a variety of styles should emerge. Parental and staff reaction to these styles will help determine their success.

Self-Image and Aloneness

How these principals felt about their positions and their own self during the first month was a major focus of their reports. When new principals receive word of their first appointment, a variety of feelings overtake them. Sosne (1982) noted that new principals "experience two sharp emotions: first, elation at having been appointed to the most critical post schools have to offer; and

second, anxiety about their ability to meet the demands of the job" (p. 14).

Jill stated "I'm having a delightful, delightful time doing this...but how do you keep your energy level up? I find myself dragging myself home. There is total excitement of trying to see and to do. I need vitamins!" Tricia said, "I enjoy giving steno, it's an incredible time-saver. My secretary asked me!" The delight with the new position is tempered with unsuredness and feelings of aloneness. Tricia stated, "when people are not in my office, I feel very much alone. There are times I don't know what to do or who to go to, that's another thing that bothers me. I don't who I can trust; it sounds bizarre, paranoid." Jill referred to another first year principal, a male, in her district, "we have become dependent upon each other for support. The other principals are supportive, but we tend to bounce ideas off each other first." Marge talked about how her feet hurt having to wear high-heeled shoes and questioned if male principals experience the same. All the principals stated that the first days went better than they anticipated. Jill worried, "It's beginning to scare me. Everything is going too smoothly." This uncertainty is further reflected in a statement she made about some parents she had asked to move from blocking the lobby, "Of course nothing was said to my face, but I'm sure several things were said behind my back. Tricia said, "You're asked questions and you don't even understand the questions. None of the names click. When this happens, it's an embarrassing thing. You are trying to act humble, yet in charge and in control." Marge grudgingly admitted, "I've had to swallow my beliefs," when she referred to the science program which was finally accepted. All the principals spoke of

their first PTA meetings positively. They stated that the parents in attendance were accepting and that they received positive feedback. Jill summed it up with "What I thought would be a horror turned out well." Other positive strokes reported included Marge's account of the Superintendent praising her team for the Board presentation. She was also pleased with her staff who sat up front at a meeting "when I only suggested it! It was a nice gesture on their part." and Tricia's "I'm getting a lot of positive feedback. I guess what I have heard is true — all the bad things that happen you get blamed for whether you did it or not, but you also get credit for the good things whether you had anything to do with them or not." Will these feelings of aloneness and the questioning of their abilities change as these principals experience more, and become comfortable with their surroundings?

Relationship to the Other Subjects

As I have concentrated on the female principals for this presentation, I will briefly examine how the male principals reported on the first month as they relate to the female principals. In reviewing the data on the male principals in my study, I found most of the same themes especially reactive encounters, time management, and self-image and aloneness. All six principals complained about the time spent on non-educational issues and the inordinate amount of time attending meetings outside the building. Each principal was enthusiastic yet wary. They longed for someone to talk to and share their feelings. Many of them spoke of the different factions

"testing the new principal." The males used more career building phrases such as "stepping-stone" than did the women. The women tended to use the pronoun "my" when discussing the school and the children. However the most striking difference between the males and the females was the paucity of reported encounters with Central Office on the parts of the males. Only one male principal described a negative incident with regard to Central Office. He commented that Central Office "was after another principal, if she makes waves ...they give me a hard time too, but since I came from Central Office, it's not quite as bad."

The first year principals then seem to have much in common. They experience similar events regardless of the size or location of the schools. However the males and females seem to have a slightly different view of their roles within the administrative team and the role that the position of principal fits into their future career.

The reports of the first month by female principals reveal that it is a time of excitement and exhaustion, a time of encounters and questions, and a time of finding herself and developing a style with which she and her co-workers can live and succeed. As the year progresses will her attitudes, relationships, experiences, and other perceptions of her position change?

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Appendix A

Preliminary Information Form

Questionnaire

Thank you for participating in the study of the daily lives of first year principals. Please complete the following questionnaire.

School Information/School District

1. Your School:

_____a. Enrollment

_____b. Socio-economic level

2. Your Subordinates:

_____Total Number of Assistant Principals

_____Total Number of Teachers

_____Total Number of Paraprofessionals or Teacher Aides

_____Total Number of Secretaries

_____Total Number of Custodians

3. Your District:

_____Total Number of Elementary Schools

_____Total Number of Junior High Schools

_____Total Number of High Schools

_____Total Enrollment of School District

Personal Information

1. _____Age

2. _____Sex

3. Ethnicity: (Check One)

_____American Indian

_____Asian/Pacific Islands

_____Black

_____Hispanic

_____White

4. Educational Background:

Highest Degree Earned (Check One)

_____Doctorate

_____Master's Degree plus 60

_____Master's Degree plus 30

_____Master's Degree

_____Other (Please specify)

_____ Area/Areas of Degree

Specialization_____

5. Prior Administrative Experience: (Please check)

_____None

_____Assistant Principal

_____Number of years

_____Central Office Administrator

Please specify position:_____

_____Number of years

_____Other (Please specify)_____

6. Total Number of Years of Teaching Experience:

_____Elementary

_____Middle School

_____Junior High

_____Senior High